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MOHAWK
AND
SENECA
SET RIGHT
1894

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MOHAWK AND SENECA SET RIGHT

BY THE AID OF A LEARNED COLONIAL GOVERNOR,

T. POWNALL.

A PAPER

READ APRIL 3, 1894, BEFORE THE PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE COUNTY OF YORK, ONTARIO, BY THE

REV. HENRY SCADDING, D.D.

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MOHAWK AND SENECA.

The names of a number of Colonial Governors of Provinces prior to the establishment of Independence, are still remembered by American writers and readers on account of administrative capacity, benevolence of disposition and tact; amongst others are those of Oglethorpe, Winthrop, Delancy, Sir W. Phipps, Sir Edmund Andros, Lord Baltimore, etc; but not one of them is so decidedly recalled on account of literary skill and scholarly pursuits as is that of Thomas Pownall, Governor of Massachusetts from 1756 to 1763. I possess a volume dated London, 1782, containing a collection of papers from Governor Pownall's pen, which fully support a reputation of this kind. He discusses, for example, such subjects as the following: Analysis of the elements of Speech, as applicable to etymology; a Treatise on Picture-writing, Hiero-Glyphic and Elementary Writing; On the Ships of the Ancient Romans, Triremes, Quadriremes, Guinqueremes, etc., and their war chariots. The whole dedicated to the President, Council and Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of England, a copy of whose seal is prefixed to the dedication. Other writings by Governor Pownall were the following: A Letter to Adam Smith, on his Wealth of Nations; Principals of Polity; Affairs of the East Indies in 1773; Drainage and Navigation; Hydraulic and Nautical Observations on the currents in the Atlantic Ocean; Intellectual Physics, etc. Numerous artistic sketches from nature by his hand have also been engraved. But on the present occa-

sion I desire to direct attention solely or chiefly to that subdivision of the Treatise on the Study of Antiquities already referred to which relates to the Indians of North America, and that of the Tartars of the north-eastern parts of Asia. Governor Pownall was, as has been observed, a man of high culture and one who had indulged in the study of comparative philology. He consequently noted with great interest the dialects of the Indians with whom he found himself surrounded in the Province of Massachusetts, and was enabled to detect such striking coincidences between usages in their language and those of the languages of the Tartars of eastern Asia as to induce him to believe in the identity of the two races. In regard to this latter point, Bancroft, in his history of the United States, vol. 3, p. 318, informs us that the Connecticut explorer, John Ledyard, as he stood in Siberia with men of the Mongolian race before him, and compared them with the Indians who had been his playmates at Dartmouth, declared deliberately that universally and circumstantially they resemble the aborigines of America. On the Connecticut river and the Oby he saw but one race.

Governor Pownall in the course of his observations on the identity of the native races inhabiting North America and the north-east of Asia, throws light on a certain difficulty which must have presented itself incidentally to everyone who may have been engaged in the study of works relating to the aborigines of our country, and in particular of works relating to the famous confederation, commonly known as the six nations of the Iroquois. The difficulty or rather peculiarity is this: In the list of the names of the several cantons or members of the confederation, when we come to the Mohawks and Senecas, we are informed by the authorities that these two nations bore other names, which by some

means seem to have dropped out of common use, and to have been superseded by the current names which are so familiar to us, namely, Mohawks and Senecas.

Horatio Hale, in his Iroquois Book of Rites, pp. 9 and 10, Philadelphia edition, 1883, gives the names of the six nations in order thus :—1, Mohawks ; 2, Oneidas ; 3, Onondagas ; 4, Cayugas ; 5, Senecas ; 6, Tuscaroras. Schoolcraft in his "Notes on the Iroquois," Albany, 1847, coincides with Hale in this enumeration ; but then we are assured in Hale's account that the proper appellation of the Mohawks was Caniengas, "people at the head of men," that is to say of the confederacy, and that the Senecas were more correctly styled Sonontouans, "people on or beyond the mountains," and no adequate reason is given for the fact that in practice one name superseded the other, that the Caniengas were universally spoken of as Mohawks, and the Sonontouans as Senecas.

It is precisely at this point that Pownall's observations afford some help ; according to him Mohawk is not the name in particular of one of the cantons of the Iroquois League, but a term simply implying the position of the group of aborigines so called, relative to tribes dwelling nearer to the Atlantic seaboard, and the name Seneca, likewise, is to be understood in a similar manner. We must imagine ourselves for the moment standing away down south of the Mohawk valley, in the old Dutch settlements around the modern New York, or in one of the New England States among the aborigines of Massachusetts, near the sea-coast, where the terms Mohawk and Seneca were first heard. Governor Pownall, skilful philologist as he was, gathered from these natives that it was a custom of their language to prefix particles which indicated the nearer or more remote position of an object. Thus, for example, the particle ma or mo prefixed indicated comparative nearness to the speaker,

and some such particle as se or sen indicated remoteness. Now we are to imagine some such brief word as aka or aga, having the signification of people or region ; then Mo-aka or Mo-aga would signify a people or region *near* to the speaker, and Sen-aka or Sen-aga a people or region at some distance from him ; and these words were usually accompanied, Pownall says, by a motion of the hand or arm towards the speaker if nearness, and away from the speaker if remoteness were implied. Hither and farther would well express what is intended : Mo-aga would be the hither tribe, Sen-aga the farther tribe ; with this usage we may compare our own employment of Cis and tran, in Cis-alpine, Trans-alpine, Cis-atlantic, Trans-atlantic, etc. They were names evidently intended for outsiders and not to be employed by the people themselves. I would say at once that in the terms used, there is the greatest variety of orthography, as was the case with Indian terms generally. Mo-aga, Mo-aka, Ma-aka, for Mohawk, and Sen-aga, Sen-aka, Sen-aca, for Seneca. This irregularity arose from the different ways in which the sounds in the Indian words were expressed by Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Germans and Englishmen. The form Seneca suited the English because it was already well known to them as the name of a Latin writer on morals, tutor to the rather infamous Nero, and Mohawk perhaps struck their fancy simply because the syllable hawk was so familiar to them as denoting a bird of prey. Possibly tomahawk, the name by which a well-known Indian weapon is known in English, was similarly evolved.

It is curious to observe from the very beginning what blundering there has been in regard to native Indian nomenclature. The term Indian itself, as we all know, originated in a mistake. Columbus imagined that he had reached the coast of Asia, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hindostan or India. The people whom he found dwelling on the

Monument to mark the exact site of the Old French Fort, at Toronto.

On the last day of the Semi-Centennial celebration at Toronto, in 1884, the foundation of a Memorial Column or Shaft, after a design by the architects, Messrs. Langley & Burke, to mark the exact site of "The Old French Fort," or Trading Post, established at Toronto in 1749, was laid by His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, in the presence of the Worshipful the Mayor of the City, A. W. Boswell, Esq., and a large concourse of spectators assembled from the surrounding country and from the United States The custody of the begun structure was at the same time formally accepted by the Mayor in the name of the City.

It is very desirable that this Column or Shaft, intended to perpetuate to future generations the memory of an interesting fact in our early history, and calculated to be an ornament to the Exhibition Park and an attractive object to all visitors and strangers, should be carried forward to completion, if not at once, at least by instalments year after year.

You are earnestly requested to assist in the creation of a fund for this purpose, either by sending a donation to the Treasurer, W. B. McMurrich, Esq., who will carefully make a record of donors' names, or by dropping a contribution into one of the Boxes provided for such gifts from young and old, among the general public, at the Simcoe (Southern) Pioneers' Cabin and at the Secretary's table in the Museum of the Zoological and Acclimatization Society, in the Park.

The following gentlemen will act as a Committee for carrying forward the Memorial Column to completion :—His Honour the Lieut.-Governor, Hon. John Beverley Robinson, His Worship the Mayor, Alexander Manning, Esq., J. J. Withrow, Esq., W. B. McMurrich, Esq., A. W. Boswell, Esq., Col. Gzowski, A.D.C., and Rev. Dr. Scadding. The Chairman and members of the City Exhibition Committee and the Managing Committee of the Industrial Association have likewise expressed a hearty interest in the undertaking.

Toronto, September, 1885.

shore he accordingly styled Indians. Even the name Iroquois is a conventional French expression and not a native Indian one, that was the somewhat formidable appellative Kanonsionni, the people of the extended house. Iro or hiro was heard as a frequent concluding form for speeches in council and koué was an utterance of approbation. Accordingly, an epithet with a proper grammatical termination was constructed, glancing at these peculiarities, probably in a humorous mood. Huron in like manner, is nothing more than a French soubriquet or nickname, which has now permanently displaced the native name Wyandot.* Agniers, Lambkins, for Mohawks, was perhaps a word of the same class. In the days of Good Queen Anne, certain pests of the streets of London, sometimes footpads and sometimes simply practical jokers, styled themselves Mohocks, one more deviation from the primitive use and meaning of the word. Another instance of permanent misplacement of names, is that of the Lenni-Lenappe Indians, who, inhabiting the shores of the Delaware River and Delaware Bay, came to be known as Delawares, just as our own Missassagas acquired their name from the river Missassaga, on the north shore of Lake Huron; the first bands of these Indians encountered by Europeans on the north shore of Lake Ontario, having strayed down southwards from that quarter. They were really Ochipways, the term Missassaga signifying nothing more than river with a big outlet—Michi-saugeen.

*Formed from Hure, which Boyer thus defines:—"Tete d'un sanglier, d'un ours, d'un loup et d'un brochet—the head of a wild boar, or a bear, wolf and of a great pike." But Boyer adds a further meaning of Hure, which probably contains the comparison referred to in the French nickname as descriptive of the hair on the head of an unkempt Wyandot:—"Tete mal peignee, cheveux rudes et mal en ordre, clotted, matted hair, a nasty head of hair." Possibly Horace's picture of the witch Sagana was in the Frenchman's mind.

"Horret capillis ut marinus asperis
Echinus aut currens aper."—*Epode* 5, 27,28.

Governor Pownall's studies in comparative philology have thus helped us to a more intelligent understanding of some familiar Indian expressions than we could have derived from the writings of Schoolcraft, Horatio Hale, Stone, Bancroft and even Parkman, who, while full enough on the subject of Mohawks and Senecas, do not happen to have recorded the origin and etymological meaning of the two expressions themselves, and this must be my justification for having ventured to recall on the present occasion, the name and reputation of an old colonial Governor long since passed away. It only remains to add that Governor Pownall, after returning from America in 1761, became a man of considerable note in British society and was returned as member of parliament for Tregony, Cornwall, in 1768. His name in this capacity figures in the debate on Pitt's celebrated Quebec Bill, which gave a constitution to Canada. He died at Bath, in 1805. A portrait of Governor Pownall is preserved in the rooms of the Historical Society at Boston, and a pleasing woodcut of the same personage is to be seen in Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography, attached to a complete and very interesting memoir. Two places in the United States bear the name of Pownall, one in Maine, the other in Vermont.